Financial assistance to agricultural producers

632. SHRI J. CHITHARANJAN:
SHRI V.V. RAGHAVAN:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government will extend the steps taken in the case of Coffee Growers, like re-scheduling of crop loans, granting fresh loans and interest subsidy scheme, to the cultivators of various agricultural products like coconut, arecanut, tobacco, tea, cotton, pepper etc; and

(b) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI RAJIV PRATAP RUDI): (a) and (b) There is no such proposal presently under consideration.

Free trade with Bangladesh

633. SHRI A. VIJAYA RAGHAVAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any proposal for free trade with Bangladesh; and

(b) if so, the details thereof including the present status of the proposal?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI RAJIV PRATAP RUDI): (a) and (b) During the SAARC Summit held in Colombo in July 1998, the Prime Minister had indicated that India would be willing to consider entering into bilateral Free Trade Agreements with SAARC countries which were interested in moving faster towards trade liberalisation. No response to this offer has been received from Bangladesh.

Reform in tea auction system

634. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the

news-item captioned "Reforms in tea auction system soon" which appeared in "The Hindu" dated the 18th June, 2002;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps proposed to be taken to deal with the problems faced by the tea industry particularly the small scale sector because of the prevailing low prices?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI RAJIV PRATAP RUDI): (a) to (c) Yes Sir. As indicated in the news-item, the Government is seized of the problems being faced by the tea industry, including the small tea growers, in the present situation of prevailing low prices. The main factors contributing to the low prices of tea include, excess supply of tea, low demand from overseas countries, low rate of growth of domestic consumption and the quality of tea.

Besides providing necessary assistance to the tea industry, including small growers, through the developmental schemes being implemented by the Tea Board, Government has also taken other steps for the benefit of the tea industry. These include, promotion of tea consumption in the domestic market through a generic tea promotional campaign highlighting the health aspects of tea, launched in coordination with the tea industry, a quality upgradation programme being implemented through the Tea Board for improving the quality of tea, creating awareness among producers for reducing cost of production, implementation of a medium term export strategy formulated in consultation with international consultants, and assisting tea exporters in their marketing efforts abroad. The primary marketing system of tea has also been studied to look at the need for possible reforms in the tea auction system.

Industries in rural areas

635. PROF. M. M. AGARWAL: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have formulated any specific long-term policy for setting up of new industries in the rural areas of the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and